

## LIQUID LOGIC: THE THREE STAGES OF GELITIN

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Gelitin has been a presence in my professional life—sometimes something akin to a force of nature, sometimes a mere pulsating hum in the back of my mind—for more than fifteen years now; yet of all the writings occasioned by my encounters with their work over time, none, as far as I can remember, has ever made mention of humour as a foundational element of their practice. Pleasure, play, joy, entertainment even, the comedic and the ludic—these are all notions frequently or passingly used in my descriptions and characterizations of Gelitin's world to date, but humour? Not so much. This absence or avoidance may have something to do with the problem of humour in contemporary art, so to speak—so often painfully demonstrated in exhibitions “about” humour-in-art which are almost always, as a rule, singularly unfunny or “humourless”. Humour, however, there certainly is—plenty. Or better still: humours there are—plenty, in the old-fashioned, obsolete sense of bodily fluids as expounded in the Hippocratic theory of the four humours, that is: black bile (the Greek translation of which constitutes the root of our melancholy), yellow bile (from which the choleric temperament derives), phlegm (source of the phlegmatic temper), and blood (to which we owe the sanguine character). To which, for a more complete understanding of Gelitin cosmology, should be added secretions of the bladder and intestinal tract, as well as sperm and—as exemplified in the 2001 performance piece *Nella Nutella*—the foul sludge filling the water ways of Venice. Indeed, looked at from this alchemistic-etymological perspective, Gelitin is, in fact, all humour, and there is something as yet unexplored and undertheorized in their formal fascination with fluids—with liquefaction as a sculptural principle—and with bodily fluids first and foremost of course. I see it seep, spill and spray in all directions here.

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A propos the principles of sculpture: the scale on which Gelitin so often work, and the very shapes of the objects produced while doing so, easily lure

one into discussing their work primarily in terms borrowed from the language (and, more problematically still, world-view) of architecture—which would be a mistake. To begin with, the oft-quoted anarchic or anarchistic spirit that lends the foursome’s working ways and output their signature improvisational, open-ended flavor seems diametrically opposed, almost as a matter of dogma, to the centralized, hierarchic ethos of the architectural paradigm (“anarchitects”). More importantly, however, is the matter of their profound commitment to the art of sculpting as the organizing principle of their creative process and resultant oeuvre—as well as the concomitant matter of their commitment to... matter. (Forms, shapes, stuff.) What they do may look like building, but is really more making (a key distinction, opposition even): entities that look like architectural structures or architectonic archetypes “remain” works of art, free from the pragmatic pressure of adding up or otherwise making sense as objects of everyday social use—which may be one reason why they appear so drawn to the rhetoric of the monument: architecture’s most glaring paradox—uninhabitable buildings, as in an obelisk or a triumphal arch. (Other than that, they obviously relish the opportunity of ridiculing the grandiose claims built into the very fabric of the monumentalizing impulse, so often expressed in phallic imagery.) And so here too, in the tripartite story of POKALYPSEA - APOKALYPSE - OKALYPSEAP the fundamental question is one that quite literally questions the fundamentals of sculpture as given, for instance, in the traditionally three-fold way of matter’s manifestation in the known universe: solid (plasticine, Styrofoam, wood), liquid (the triumphal arch’s well-aimed water jet), gas (cigarette smoke, the settling dust all around); or in the liquid logic of matter’s preferred paths of “transitioning”—freezing and melting; condensing and evaporating.<sup>1</sup> One could do worse, by the way, than looking at such “phase transitions”—I am immediately reminded here of Gelitin’s Zapf de Pipi, a stalactite of frozen urine made for the 1st Moscow Biennial

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<sup>1</sup> There are, in fact, four ways in which matters exists in the known universe: solid, liquid, gas, and plasma—but I cannot for the life of me think of any application of plasma in the field of art.

in 2005, as well as of the preponderance of organic, i.e. “naturalistic” imagery in their practice as a whole—as nature’s examples of making art... To return, in conclusion, to the liquid logic undergirding the Hippocratic theory of the four humours as well as, more pertinently, Gelitin’s aesthetic of liquefaction: I can only think of one word in the end, its myriad meanings infusing so much of what they do, and who they are: FLOW. This text acts as an introduction to the third chapter of the four-part exhibition series Slight Agitation. This installation consists of three monumental sculptures realized by Viennese artist collective Gelitin.